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Reply dated 6 July 2006  
Responsive to Final Office Action mailed on 9 June 2006

AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

The following set of claims replaces the previous claims.

1 - 14 (Cancelled)

15. (New) An absorbent article comprising:

a topsheet and a backsheet joined together and forming a first waist region, a second waist region, a crotch region interposed between the waist regions, and a void space between the topsheet and the backsheet for receiving bodily exudates, the absorbent article having a longitudinal axis and a lateral axis,

wherein the topsheet has a slit opening providing access into the void space, the slit opening being positioned in at least the crotch region, extending along the longitudinal axis, and having longitudinally extending laterally opposing side edges, the topsheet also having longitudinally extending laterally opposing elasticated regions disposed along the respective side edges of the slit opening.

16. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 15 further comprising a first elastic waistband disposed in the first waist region and a second elastic waistband disposed in the second waist region, the elasticated regions extending longitudinally between and being attached to the first elastic waistband and the second elastic waistband.

17. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 15 wherein the elasticated regions are laterally spaced apart a least distance in the crotch region and diverge laterally toward each of the waist regions, thereby forming an X-shape.

18. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 15 wherein the absorbent article is a disposable diaper and further comprises an absorbent core encased between the topsheet and the backsheet.

19. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 18 wherein the void space is formed between the topsheet and the absorbent core.

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20. (New) An absorbent article comprising:

a topsheet and a backsheet joined together and forming a first waist region, a second waist region, a crotch region interposed between the waist regions, and a void space between the topsheet and the backsheet for receiving bodily exudates, the absorbent article having a longitudinal axis and a lateral axis,

wherein the topsheet has a slit opening providing access into the void space, the slit opening being positioned in at least the crotch region, extending along the longitudinal axis, and having longitudinally extending laterally opposing side edges, the topsheet also having longitudinally extending laterally opposing elasticated regions disposed along the respective side edges of the slit opening,

the side edges of the slit opening converging together to form longitudinally opposing first and second end edges of the slit opening having the forms of points where the side edges meet.

21. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 20 further comprising a first elastic waistband disposed in the first waist region and a second elastic waistband disposed in the second waist region, the elasticated regions extending longitudinally from the first elastic waistband to the second elastic waistband.

22. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 21 wherein the elasticated regions comprise elastic bands extending longitudinally between and being attached to the first elastic waistband and the second elastic waistband.

23. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 20 wherein the elasticated regions are laterally spaced apart a least distance in the crotch region and diverge laterally toward each of the waist regions, thereby forming an X-shape.

24. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 20 wherein the absorbent article is a disposable diaper.

25. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 24 further comprising an absorbent core encased between the topsheet and the backsheet.

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26. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 25 wherein the void space is formed between the topsheet and the absorbent core.
27. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 20 wherein the first end edge is disposed distant from the lateral axis in a direction toward the first waist region and the second end edge is disposed distant from the lateral axis in a direction toward the second waist region.
28. (New) An absorbent article comprising:  
a topsheet and a backsheet joined together and forming a first waist region, a second waist region, a crotch region interposed between the waist regions, and a void space between the topsheet and the backsheet for receiving bodily exudates, the absorbent article having a longitudinal axis and a lateral axis,  
wherein the topsheet has a slit opening providing access into the void space, the slit opening being positioned in at least the crotch region, extending along the longitudinal axis, and having longitudinally extending laterally opposing side edges, the topsheet also having longitudinally extending laterally opposing elasticated regions disposed along the respective side edges of the slit opening,  
the slit opening having an irregular hexagonal shape including longitudinally opposing triangular portions, where the side edges of the slit opening converge together to form longitudinally opposing first and second end edges of the slit opening having the forms of points where the side edges meet, and a rectangular portion connecting the triangular portions, the side edges being substantially parallel to each other in the rectangular portion.
29. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 28 further comprising a first elastic waistband disposed in the first waist region and a second elastic waistband disposed in the second waist region, the elasticated regions extending longitudinally from the first elastic waistband to the second elastic waistband.

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30. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 29 wherein the elasticated regions comprise elastic bands extending longitudinally between and being attached to the first elastic waistband and the second elastic waistband.
31. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 28 wherein the elasticated regions are laterally spaced apart a least distance in the crotch region and diverge laterally toward each of the waist regions, thereby forming an X-shape.
32. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 28 wherein the absorbent article is a disposable diaper and further comprises an absorbent core encased between the topsheet and the backsheet.
33. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 36 wherein the void space is formed between the topsheet and the absorbent core.
34. (New) The absorbent article of Claim 28 wherein the first end edge is disposed distant from the lateral axis in a direction toward the first waist region and the second end edge is disposed distant from the lateral axis in a direction toward the second waist region.